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GRADING IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE--A PROPOSAL.

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THIS PAPER PRESENTS A CASE FOR MAKING JUNIOR COLLEGE GRADING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES COMPATIBLE WITH THE STATED PURPOSES OF THE JUNIOR COLLEGE. IT LISTS SOME HISTORIC AND PERSONAL PHILOSOPHIC ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING PURPOSES. THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE GRADING PRACTICES WITH THESE PURPOSES IS REVIEWED THROUGH SOME STUDIES MADE AT GROSSMONT COLLEGE, WHICH INDICATED THAT 43 PERCENT OF ALL STUDENTS IN 1964 WERE DISQUALIFIED OR PLACED ON PROBATION. THE AUTHOR PROPOSES THAT THE A, B, AND C GRADES BE MAINTAINED AS PARALLEL TO STATE COLLEGE STANDARDS. A GRADE OF D WOULD BE PASSING BUT NOT RECOMMENDED FOR TRANSFER TO A 4-YEAR COLLEGE, AND F WOULD CONTINUE TO MEAN FAILURE. A GRADE OF B SHOULD CONTINUE TO COMPENSATE FOR D IN COMPUTING GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR TRANSFER ELIGIBILITY. A NEW GRADE COULD INDICATE THAT THE STUDENT PROFITED, BUT NOT AT A LEVEL RECOMMENDING ADVANCEMENT TO THE NEXT COURSE OR INSTITUTION. BY THIS GRADING SYSTEM THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE WOULD BE AWARDED TO ANY STUDENT WHO MET ALL COURSE REQUIREMENTS AT D LEVEL OR ABOVE. (DE)

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GRADING IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A PROPOSAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

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Grossmont College
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The grading policies and practices in most junior colleges reflect an attitude analogous to those churches which in every way discourage any real sinners from dirtying up the congregation. This may be exaggerating the case a bit, but not much. Look at the catalog statement of aims and objectives and compare them with the probation and disqualification rulings. The philosophy promises the healing fruits of education to Everyman but the probation policy carries the hooker that Everyman has to be above average in the digestion of this fruit or be in jeopardy of being driven from the garden. Further, the measure of his digestion is his power of regurgitation since the degree of actual nourishment doesn't lend itself to easy quantification.

The fact is that grading policies and practices can't be separated from the assumptions of purpose to be served by a junior college. Take the seventy plus public junior colleges in California (minus Diablo Valley College which manages to be an exception in many regards) and observe how their grading and disqualification policies define their real as opposed to their stated purposes. They insist that all but remedial courses are transferable at least to the state colleges if not to the universities. This further blurs what was always an artificial distinction between transfer and terminal courses and pleasantly pushes each instructor into grading by what he likes to call "transfer standards." No instructor or department wants a negative differential between grades earned before and after transfer, so the instructor moves with rather universal applause toward the virtue of high standards. With an unselected student population this means about 40% get D's, F's or are eased out of the course with a W grade. At the same time the college as a whole rules that a student not only has to have a C average or better to graduate, but a 2. average or better to stay off probation and out of jeopardy of disqualification. So, what have the California public junior colleges said about their purpose? Their grading and probation policies and graduation requirements have loudly proclaimed that their major purpose is to be lower divisions for the state colleges and universities and that any student who graduates, or is even able to stay in the junior college for several semesters, is eligible for transfer. This is all very fine if one can blind himself to the startling casualty rate among junior college students and if one is ready to junk the societal purposes which the public junior colleges are sometimes said to serve.

Philosophic Assumptions

At one time there was considerable consensus on these purposes but that was before the population explosion assured the junior colleges of a continuous seller's market: To put it scientifically, there is a remarkable positive correlation between the twin factors of increased selectivity and stiffer retention standards and that of being an institutional fat cat. Therefore, the assumptions of purpose given below are labelled only as the personal assumptions of the writer, and admittedly the proposal on grading policy which will follow will make sense only to those who have basic agreement with these assumptions.

1. The continuation of a democratic society is based on maximum education for all its citizens.. Concentration of education on any kind of an elite, even an aristocracy of ability, is inimical to the system.

2. Education, particularly general education, can broaden, deepen and make more significant the lives of those who are exposed to it. Put negatively, the curtailment of education to anyone is like chopping out some vital potentials for life, and, since this is truly a crime against the psyche, deserves agonizing consideration by those holding the power of such curtailment.

3. Education is for manhood, not just for manpower. By this assumption junior colleges should disabuse themselves of any notion that they are a Gargantuan sieve set up by society for winnowing out those whose manpower potential is questionable. Instead they should see themselves as an institution dedicated to the maximum fulfillment of each individual, not because he is a vital cog in the vast machine but because he is a unique being with only one precious life to live.

4. The cybernation revolution is forcing a re-definition of higher education in which these postulates will have to be considered: (a) whatever faint qualitative distinction remains between transfer and terminal courses will be dissipated by the fact that the production type jobs will be automated out and the training for the technician jobs will demand an ability at least commensurate with that required for transfer courses; (b) in an economy of abundance made possible by automated production, employment success cannot be the prime value to be taught nor the raison d'etre of education; (c) when it is a stabilized and recognized fact that there are more people than there are jobs, youth will be largely unemployable; (d) an economy of abundance vastly increases the possibilities for development of humans as humans; (e) the values of a society are inextricably tied to the economic structure of that society, so if a revolutionary change occurs in the economic structure there has to be a corresponding revolutionary change in the fundamental values by which men live.

5. The public community college enrolls a group of youth and adults who are often culturally deprived. They have grown up in a wasteland of commercial T.V., radio and class B movies; have had their eyes and ears numbed by neon and rock-n-roll; and by even casual observation of budgets and community concern have learned the prevailing valuation of little league ball, marching bands, football victories and beauty contests.

6. The junior colleges, probably more than senior colleges and universities, are populated by many students who are morally underprivileged; ethically disadvantaged. Like their elders, they are not even sure where morality lies in the racial issue now dominating the American scene.

7. The junior college services a large group of youngsters whose commitment to mankind is so shallow that they may be scarcely aware if the world is going to hell in a basket, much less be willing to do anything about it.

Each of these assumptions carries the implicit conclusion that the aim of the junior college should be to hold people for maximum education, not to get rid of them. Acceptance of these assumptions puts a wedge in the "open door" which keeps it from becoming that cruel joke on the student and on the society, "the revolving door."

Studies on Grading at Grossmont College

Grossmont College is a typical community college in California. It services about 2,400 day students and another 1,000 evening students coming from a socio-economic range of upper-lower through the upper-middle class. The Grossmont College Catalog carries a policy statement calling for probation if a student falls below a C average, disqualification if he doesn't make a 2. average in the probationary grace period, and also requiring an overall C or 2. average for graduation. A summary of the grade distributions and attrition rates for succeeding fall semesters, 1961 through 1964, is given in Table 1. (See Page 4.)

It can be seen that in the fall semester, 1964, 38% of the Day and 39% of the Evening Division students either withdrew or earned non-qualifying grades. When the non-penalty withdrawals are subtracted, calculation shows that 24% of the Day and 18% of the Evening students sustained grades (D, F or WF) which would contribute to their probationary status or to their disqualification. At the end of the 1964 fall semester 1,412 of the 3,290 students who were still enrolled (411 students withdrew from college during the fall semester) were either disqualified or placed on probation. This represented 43% of the student population. Less than 4% of those already on probation earned compensatory grades sufficient to qualify them for removal from the probationary ranks. The logic of the preceding figures indicates that the higher probation and disqualification figures result from the accumulation of non-qualifying grades: 43% of all students completing the semester were put on probation or were disqualified whereas only 24% of the Day and 18% of the Evening Division students earned grades below the C level. The point being demonstrated is the accumulative nature of the academic mortality which will occur over the normal period of four semesters required for junior college graduation. At Coalinga College during a four semester period the writer found that only 27% of the regular students who entered in Fall, 1957, graduated at the end of the Spring semester, 1959.

GROSSMONT COLLEGE

TABLE I

Number and Per Cent of Grades Earned and Attrition Rate

Fall Semesters: 1961-62 through 1964-65

DAY DIVISION	A No.	A %	B No.	B %	C No.	C %	D No.	D %	F No.	F %	W No.	WF* No.	Inc. No.	Entered No.	Completed No.	Attrition Rate
Fall, 1961-62	385	10	944	25	1336	36	662	18	414	11	870	-	15	4626	3756	19%
Fall, 1962-63	772	14	1508	27	2047	36	895	16	367	07	797	91	50	6970	5639	19%
Fall, 1963-64	1025	15	1792	27	2458	37	988	15	328	05	1334	100	27	8052	6618	18%
Fall, 1964-65	1328	14	2393	25	3670	38	1568	16	700	07	1987	109	52	11,734	9670	18%
EVENING DIVISION																
Fall, 1961-62	105	13	227	28	287	35	109	14	83	10	394	--	4	1209	815	33%
Fall, 1962-63	219	16	416	30	451	33	170	12	113	08	630	22	15	2036	1384	32%
Fall, 1963-64	333	18	580	31	678	36	177	09	110	06	633	28	9	2548	1887	26%
Fall, 1964-65	419	15	854	32	989	36	293	10	155	06	950	34	17	3711	2710	27%

*For the purpose of these studies, WF's, though they have the same academic consequence as an F, were simply counted in the attrition column and did not swell the number and per cent shown in the F column.

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The usual rejoinder to presentation of this array of facts is that the students simply don't have the ability; that they are not "college calibre." Yet correlation studies between grade point average and test scores of academic aptitude are far from impressive. For example, at Grossmont College the grade earned in Health Education, a State required course, when matched with SCAT Verbal scores gave an r of .40. With SCAT Quantitative, the r was .17. Comparison of grades earned in this same Health Education course with range of scores achieved on the SCAT Verbal is instructive:

Grade	Number	Range of SCAT Verbal Scores
A	14	25 - 57
B	63	18 - 56
C	210	17 - 59
D	145	15 - 53
F	64	9 - 47

In a vocational course in physics only one A and two B grades were given. Those earning C grades (9) ranged from 25 to 47 on the SCAT Quantitative; D grades (18) ranged from 23 to 46 and F grades (4) ranged from 31 to 42.

Another counter to the grading problem described is to argue there is a great disparity in ability between terminal and transfer students and therefore they should be separated at least into separate sections if not into separate institutions. In a Fall, 1964 Grossmont College study done by Robert Steinbach the 699 terminal students were shown to have a mean score 1.4 below that of the 1,483 transfer students on the SCAT Quantitative and a mean score 3.2 below on the SCAT Verbal. Actually, as the terminal training programs in the more or less obsolescent trades give way to terminal curricula in industrial technology and to curricula in the semi-professional service occupations, the ability differential between the transfer student and the so-called terminal student will become inconsequential. To underline the point, let it be observed that the subject content in Industrial Electronics or Computer Programming or Dental Assisting or Police Science is as intrinsically difficult as the subject matter in American History or General Psychology or Introduction to Biology.

A Proposal on Grading

What alternative grading policies and practices do the public community colleges have open to them? One alternative, now being practiced, is to deny the existence of the problem; to ask what but high failure and attrition can be expected when college training is offered to an unselected group; to argue that present policies must be correct since almost all junior colleges are following them; to frankly espouse the "sieve function" of the two year college.

A second alternative, less palatable to the academic purist but one which public pressure may force, is to down-grade the A, B and C and thereby reduce the high student casualty rate. The difficulty with this alternative is that it guarantees a high negative differential between grades earned at the junior college before transfer and grades earned at the state colleges or universities after transfer. This tarnishes the junior college reputation so badly that students anticipating transfer are most reluctant to attend such a second-rate institution.

A third alternative, also widely practiced, is to establish a two track system for virtually every non-specialized course offered. In theory, the upper track course has high grading standards and the lower track equivalent (if that is the right word) has lower grading standards. The major flaw in this solution is that it is based on the invalid assumption that there is a high relationship between ability as measured by aptitude tests and academic achievement, and the equally invalid assumption that there is a clear-cut dichotomy between transfer and terminal students with the former substantially brighter than the latter.

Other negative arguments are: 1) it is expensive to operate two tracks, particularly for the small college; 2) it makes for invidious comparisons; 3) it creates a record-keeping nightmare; and 4) it inevitably results in the better instructors gravitating to the higher track and the poorer instructors being assigned to the lower track.

The last and favored alternative to be proposed admits to the reality that one cannot eat his cake and have it too. It frankly faces the problem of making an accommodation to the presentation of college level material to an unselected group. It assumes that people with different backgrounds, different interests and different abilities will profit from exposure to an educational experience at different levels, just as an unselected congregation profits from a sermon at different levels and just as a mixed audience profits from a Shakespearean play at different levels.

It further assumes it is ridiculous to eliminate from further exposure those people who by some questionable measure are deemed to be not profiting at a C (average) level. Obviously, everyone can't be above average. It admittedly de-values the Associate in Arts degree in order to keep transfer standards intact. Without question it is more permissive and less punitive than present grading practices but should result in more students being exposed to better education. It reflects an attitude that grades are a rubber yardstick at best, measuring discrete little cognitive gains rather than substantive, gut-level changes in attitudes, values and behavior. It is based on the conviction that education carries its own reward and that grades are puny and misleading motivations at best. It would strengthen, not weaken, the prerequisite system and would accept as a given fact that students deficient in tool subjects such as reading, composition, non-academic logic, speech and arith-

metic would be required to develop reasonable competency in these essential skills during their first semesters of attendance. It would carry as a corollary the right of any instructor, through due process, to dismiss from his class any student not demonstrating major effort or any student seriously interfering with the learning of others.

Holding in mind these prefatory statements, the proposal would simply be this: Hold the A, B and C grade inviolate at the state college standard, recognizing that this is slightly below the university level but also recognizing that most junior college graduates transfer to the state colleges. Allow the D grade to mean exactly what it has always been claimed to mean, i.e., passing. Let it be recorded on the transcript as passing but not recommending at the state college or university level. Continue to allow a B grade to compensate for a D grade in computing grade point average for transfer elegibility. Institute a new grade, perhaps to be called an E or a P, and interpret to all concerned that this grade means that in the best judgment of the instructor the student profited substantially from the course but not at a level that would recommend advancement to the next level course or next level of education. An F would mean what it has always meant: failure. Instructors would have the prerogative of giving an F rather than a P to students who may have profited but at a level much below their potential.

With this as the grading system then the Associate in Arts or Associate in Science Degree would be awarded to any student who met all course requirements at a D level or above. Transfer would be recommended for those students who maintained a C average or above. Probation or disqualification would not be automatic at any particular grade point average. Instead, individual instructors could disqualify students who demonstrably were not making major effort in their particular classes and a procedure would be developed whereby any student sustaining one or more F's could be called before a panel of his instructors and counselor to defend his eligibility to continue to take any courses at the college.

This paper presents a case for making junior college grading policies and procedures compatible with the stated purposes of the junior college. It lists some historic and some personal philosophic assumptions re: purposes for which the junior college should strive. The incompatibility of the grading practices with these purposes is reviewed through some studies made at Grossmont College. Alternative grading policies are then analyzed and a proposal is made for a grading system designed to hold rather than eliminate students, to protect the meaning of the A, B and C grades, and to avoid the first and second class educational experience inherent within the system of curricular tracks.

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